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#43153

THE VENUS OF MILO;

FROM THE GERMAN

OF

HERMAN GRIMM.

TRANSLATED BY ALICE M. HAWES.

BOSTON:
J. J. LAWES, 29 TREMONT ROW.
1868.

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BOSTON DAILY ADVERTISER.

THURSDAY MORNING, AUG. 20, 1874

The Venus of Milo, now in the Louvre at Paris, has of late been the subject of vehement controversy among artists and connoisseurs of high pretension. The question at issue is whether the statue originally stood alone, Venus Victrix, or in a group with Mars. For evidence the contending parties resorted to the island of Milos, in the Levant, the scene of its *renaissance* half a century or more ago. The story is that in January 1820 a peasant named Yorgos, while digging up the earth round a small tree, was startled by the sudden disappearance of the tree in the apparently solid

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THE VENUS OF MILO.

To the Editor of the Transcript: It is unfortunate that any persons should, at this late day, attempt to add to the uncertainties that exist already, in most minds, concerning the Venus of Milo. The announcement that the missing arms have been found will cause only a smile in those who are best acquainted with its history, and every thoughtful person will wait until these newly-discovered pieces are taken to the Louvre, where they can be compared with the Venus and their value determined by competent archæologists, before the statement can be accepted as true.

Evidence is not wanting, that has never been contradicted, that the arms of the Venus were not missing when it was found, and that they were broken and lost by the Turks, who attempted to possess it. At the time it was taken to Paris there were, among other pieces, part of an arm and a fragment of a hand, that, in spite of all the probabilities in

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THE VENUS OF MILO.

Dr. S. A. Green.

FA 4973.9.5

Opposite me stands the form of the VENUS OF MILO. For years I have mused upon it daily, often with indifference, often in idle reverie, without knowing what I had before me, and suddenly it appeared as if I saw it for the first time, but far more beautiful than ever.

All that adorns and elevates a woman in our eyes seems to me united in these features. I think of the queenly pride of Juno and find it here again; I think of the deserted beauty of Psyche, and her tears seem to roll over these cheeks; I think of the bewildering smile of Aphrodite—it hovers round this mouth. See the graceful outline of these lips; the upper one softly rounded in the middle, then curving back on either side, then gradually swelling out again until at length it is merged in the corner of the mouth, which is open but only a little. Does she speak? Does she sigh? Does she breathe the incense that ascends in tribute to her? Yes, whatever we believe that she can do, that she does. Daintily lies the dimpled under lip beneath the upper, the middle of which slightly overhangs it just as it often does in the faces of children; but there is nothing weak or

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childish in these wonderful features. The chin is graceful and delicate, but firmly rounded and curved with a full proud outline to the neck, that is soft like that of the Venus de Medici, but slender as of the Diana of the Stag, and of the purest symmetry which no words can fitly express.

The eyes seem small, but this is first noticed when we contemplate them alone. The eyelids are narrow and without sharp lines. How differently are they formed in the Pallas Athene of Phidias, where we almost believe we see the threatening eyelashes, and the flashing orbs which they overshadow. The statue is not attributed to him, but to his gentler and weaker disciple Scopas, or to that school.

The eyebrows are but slightly curved and the eyes open. The forehead is low and broad, the cheeks wide but not full, the bridge of the nose slightly contracted between the eyes, then again separating and blending with the cheeks until it again assumes a distinct form at the point. Yet even here there is nothing sharp or ungraceful in its outlines; fully and softly rounded, yet slightly depressed, (as seen in profile a most graceful line,) it rises from the dilated nostrils and the parted lips, the upper of which with its beautiful curves is just below it.

If we examine any one of the features by itself it seems too large; if however we compare the features with each other we think them almost too small: I will not try to explain this, nor do I know the reason, but the longer and more earnestly I view this face the more does this contradiction force itself upon me. But as we study it with loving faithfulness there rise to our view dazzling beauties before unnoticed, and never the least curve which we could wish to alter. Magic is the

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effect of light and darkness when in the evening we throw upon the statue rays of light from various points. Then all seems instinct with life; the lips tremble, the eyes sparkle, and the cheeks rise and fall. What by day appears a mere plain surface, in the uncertain light is endued with living expression; upon the forehead appear delicate lines before un-noted, and we think we have found what gives to the eyes their magic charm, for around them appear deep wonderful hollows from which they shine out in their splendor. Then in the corners of the mouth nestles a smile, possible only to the goddess who gave herself to men, and yet was never frail and mortal.

If the face now speaks so eloquently, what must the whole form have expressed in the long vanished years. It is acknowledged by all to be the most beautiful relic of antique art which we possess. I have never seen the original but only the cold cast, so placed in our new museum that the light falling from the side shows the figure with but partial clearness. Yet the place is not unfavorable. It stands alone in a recess; we can step close to it and back again; we feel the noble calm, the grandeur of its presence; we can not turn away from it, but so many years have passed since the artist gave to it the finishing stroke of his chisel, and there live none now who do homage to it as the symbol of immortal love.

The charm of novelty is not causeless and vain; the century in which we live is the best—better than all that have preceded it; the spring-time whose air we breathe is more beautiful, its bird-song sweeter than in all the vanished years. It is impossible for us by any effort to live in the spirit of those departed times; all that remains to us from the bright spring-time of art lacks a certain charm

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formerly most beautiful; there live none now who have anything in common with the master, and those works through which he revealed his heart's secret, which was also that of his age and nation.

What to me is this image of a goddess? Of what use are the thoughts which it awakens? An idle longing, foreign to myself arises in me when she begins to speak. I look at her, I think, so she arose from the sea-foam, pure as the flood from which she sprung, her soul glowing through her unclothed limbs, as for us the most beautiful limbs appear through daintly folded drapery. She is not like the Medicean Venus, around whom hovers a rosy cloud of grace, while the pinions of her doves flutter above her, the goddess who raised earthly pleasure to the skies; but rather as Prometheus brought fire from heaven, she seems to have imprisoned a spark of immortal love to bestow it upon the race that look up to her with reverence. I see a temple through whose open roof streams a warm misty light, an altar from which ascends a veil of smoke laden with incense; there she stands, spotless, all untouched as yet by rude hands (either by those who overthrew her, or those others that dug her from her grave). Roses lie at her feet, and the maiden that tremblingly looks up to her, when yet a child has seen her stand there smiling as if it were impossible that she should not divine every secret, grant every wish that the heart scarcely dares to cherish.

Her own was the house, animated from the foundation-stone to the pinnacle of the dome, with a certain rythmical symmetry. From its summit could be seen at a glance the rocky land of Greece, the sea which surrounded it, and the blue heavens whose hue was reflected in the waves. Near and far were seen ships coming or going, bearing war-

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riors, victors in many battles, and patient slaves toiling at the oars in fettered servitude.

Those who lived then saw the goddess otherwise than we who have but the mutilated form from which temple and altar have departed; of which we know not when or by whom it was made, where it stood, or even how the arms were formed whose beauty we must guess by the magnificent shoulders from which they are torn away. Without doubt it is beautiful. It awakens wonder and astonishment. Our fancy carries us back to its time, but it still remains foreign to us, and while we are lost in gazing, a gentle voice whispers that for us there is no longer a soul in this loveliness.

To me this statue is like the poems of the Greeks which stir my deepest soul, but when I reflect upon the cause of my emotion, it is rather a certain calm, irresistible compulsion, than that I fully give myself up to them and eagerly long for more. Orestes and Oedipus, Iphigenia and Antigone, what have they in common with my heart? Often we unconsciously infuse into them feelings which we wish them to possess, and then believe them native and inherent. But this is only a deception. Time and people have changed far too much. The world was divided between freemen and slaves, nations fought only to destroy each other; there were other laws, other family ties, another ambition, rest and strife, than what we demand and obtain. True, the poet is raised above his time, but still he is incomprehensible without his time. The higher the flower aspires toward the sun, the deeper do the roots strike into the ground which bears it and the others. An echo of this, something foreign to us, sounds from the works of the old poets, penetrates all that belongs to antiquity. There is a wall of separation between it

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and us, transparent it may be, as if built of the purest crystal, but it remains impassible. An all-conquering longing for greater freedom and equality before God, and the law is all that to-day unites our destinies. We live, those times are dead. Our aspirations can not find rest in that which satisfied the longings of a dead century. These creations are no longer a necessity for us, nor would they be were they yet more beautiful and wonderful.

They will not perish through our neglect; ever will they show what their makers achieved, how they surrendered themselves to Nature without a thought for the past, the only way to accomplish anything truly great. They will always charm our leisure, but can never quiet our passions. If we should suddenly lose Homer, the tragedies of Pindar and his brother poets, if all memorials of ancient art were destroyed, our loss would be terrible. But would we give up Goethe, Shakespeare or Beethoven, to regain the older artists? Should we hestitate if on one side were placed the works of Raphael, Michael Angelo and Murillo, and on the other all the treasures of antiquity, and one or the other were to be taken from us? Let us enjoy them both. Let us not listen to the foolish counsel of those who would take classic studies from the hands of youth, but let us distinguish between what is closely related to us, and that at which we merely wonder, and can never comprehend, however great our effort.

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